

Fine Motor Skills

What are fine motor skills?

- The ability to move the small muscles in the hands and wrists.

What are fine motor activities?

- Things you can do to work on strengthening the muscles in your hands and wrists.
- Tasks that work on moving your hands and fingers.

What are fine motor skills used for?

- Activities where we have to use our hands and fingers to hold and manipulate materials.
- Getting ready for the day by completing tasks such as buttoning and zipping clothes, tying shoes, and brushing teeth.
- Self-feeding to use our utensils or fingers to eat.
- Opening and closing containers and jars.
- School-related tasks such as writing, drawing, coloring, and cutting.
- Playing with toys.

Why is it important to engage my child in fine motor activities?

- Fine motor activities strengthen the muscles in your hands and wrists and help your hands and fingers work together to complete a task.
- Fine motor skills are important for everyday tasks.
- Help your child learn to use both of their hands.
- Establishes a hand dominance.

When should I start working on fine motor activities with my child?

- It is never too soon to start working on fine motor activities.
- Allow your child to explore objects with their hands and fingers from a young age.
- Always be sure to supervise your child when there are small objects around, as it can be a choking hazard.

Milestones Related to Fine Motor Skills (5-12 months)

- Transfers objects between 5.5 and 7 months old
- Manipulates toy actively with wrist movements between 6 and 8 months old
- Removes pegs from pegboard between 8.5 and 12 months old
- Releases objects voluntarily between 9 and 10 months old
- Takes objects out of a container between 9 and 11 months old
- Pokes with index finger between 9 and 12 months old
- Puts objects into a container between 10 and 11 months old
- Grasps a crayon adaptively between 11 and 12 months old

Milestones Related to Fine Motor Skills (12-24 months)

- Puts three or more objects into a container between 12 and 13 months old
- Places one round peg in pegboard between 12 and 15 months old
- Points with index finger between 12 and 16 months old
- Puts many objects into a container without removing any between 14 and 15 months old
- Places two shapes in shape sorter between 15 and 18 months old
- Puts tiny objects into a small container between 15 and 23 months old
- Places six round pegs in pegboard between 16 and 19 months old
- Places all shapes in shape sorter between 19 and 24 months old
- Strings one-inch bead between 20 and 23 months old
- Begins to snips with scissors between 23 and 25 months old

Milestones Related to Fine Motor Skills (24-36 months)

- Snips on the line using scissors between 28 and 35 months old
- Starts to string $\frac{1}{2}$ inch beads around 34 months old

Home Activities to Develop Fine Motor Skills

Strainer Play

- Use the strainer from your kitchen.
- Give your child objects that will fit through the small holes in the strainer such as spaghetti noodles (the noodles can be uncooked or cooked), pipe cleaners, or any other thin and long objects that may fit.
- Have your child place these objects through the holes in the strainer.



String Objects

- Use a string, shoelace, yarn, or pipe cleaner to string objects on.
- Gather items to string such as beads, buttons, cereal (Fruit Loops, Cheerios, Apple Jacks, etc.), donuts, cookies, pasta noodles, cut up pool noodles, cut up toilet paper or paper towel rolls, egg cartons with holes cut into them, or anything else in your home that has a hole in the center and can be strung.
- Encourage your child to string the items.
- The smaller the item is, the more difficult it will be for your child.



The Hungry Tennis Ball

- Cut a slit into a tennis ball or a similar type of ball if you do not have a tennis ball.
- Find different items that you can fit inside the ball such as coins, beads, buttons, cereal, cotton balls, pom poms, cut up pieces of straw, small rocks, or anything else you have in the home.
- Use a marker or pen to draw a face on the ball to make it come to life.
- Encourage your child to feed the hungry tennis ball by squeezing it open with one hand and placing items in it with another hand.



Lacing Boards

- Use cardboard or paper to create your own lacing board.
- You can use an entire piece of cardboard or paper or cut it into different shapes.
- Punch holes around the edges of the paper or cardboard.
- Use a string, shoelace, or yarn and have your child lace.



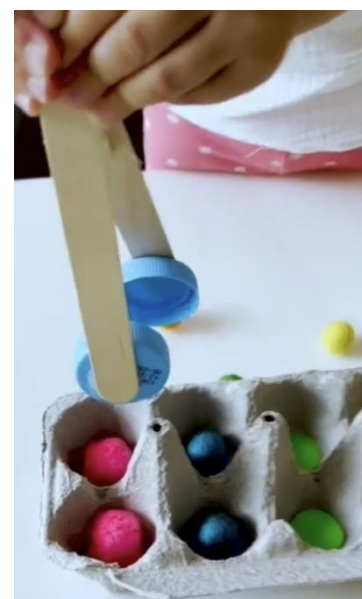
Clothespin or Chip Clip Activities

- Use clothespins or chip clips to strengthen hand muscles.
- Have your child place the clothespins or chip clips onto different surfaces such as paper, cardboard boxes, books, toilet paper rolls, blankets, or anything else you may have in your home.
- You can try and pick up small items such as cotton balls with them.
- Be careful to make sure your child is safe when using these, so they do not get little fingers caught!



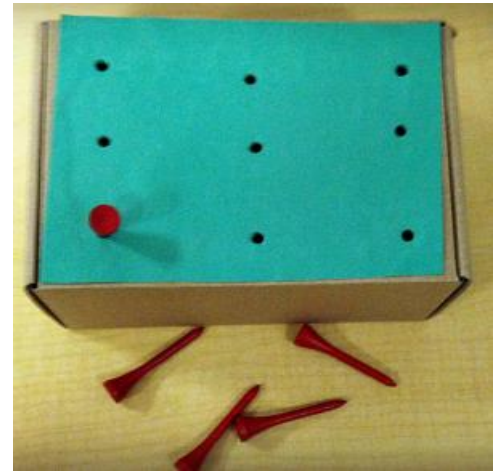
Tong Activities

- Similar to clothespins or chip clips, try using tongs for hand strengthening activities.
- You can use kitchen tongs or make your own tongs.
- To make your own, use a clothespin, 2 bottle caps, and 2 popsicle sticks. Glue the popsicle sticks to the outsides of the clothespin. Glue the bottle caps to the inside of the popsicle sticks.
- Encourage your child to pick up items with the tongs. They can place cotton balls, pom poms, beads, buttons, or other small objects into bowls, containers, cartons, or anything else.
- Try and be creative with the materials in your home. Check out this fun container that was turned into a crocodile so children can use tongs to feed him food.



Pegboard

- Use a cardboard box, such as a shoebox, to create a pegboard.
- Poke holes into the top of the box.
- Use golf tees, Q-tips, straws, popsicle sticks, pipe cleaners, or anything else that can fit into the holes.
- Have your child to place the items into and out of the pegboard.



Ziploc Bags

- Give your child a couple Ziploc bags and let them explore by opening and closing it.
- You can even give them some items in your home to place in there such as cereal, dried pasta, cotton balls, buttons, wine corks, pouch tops, paper clips, or anything else you have in your home.



Tape

- Let your child peel and stick tape on the floor, tray, or any surfaces you allow them to.
- You can even try taping different objects to the wall, table, a tray, or any other surface and have your child save the objects by freeing them from the tape.



Rip Paper or Paper Towels

- Ripping paper or paper towels is a great way to strengthen the hands.
- Give your child scrap paper, newspaper, wrapping paper, or paper towels and encourage them to rip it into small pieces.



Playing with Lids and Containers

- Placing and removing lids on containers is an easy fine motor activity.
- Save your empty containers and cans for your child to play with. Here are some examples of containers or cans you can use:
 - Wipe's container
 - Peanut butter jar
 - Pouch container
 - Puffs container
 - Water bottle
 - Pringles can
 - Coffee can
 - Formula can
 - Condiment containers
 - Milk jugs
 - Parmesan cheese
 - Gum containers
 - Oatmeal can
 - Tupperware
- Let your child explore how to open and close the different containers by lifting, twisting, and pushing with their fingers.



Fishing Game

- Use some pipe cleaners and twist them to make a fish shape. If you don't have pipe cleaners you can try using twist ties, hair ties, rubber bands, paper clips, or any other small items with a hole in it.
- Fill up a bowl with water and drop your fish inside.
- Use a chop stick, straw, kitchen utensil, stick, or any other long and thin object as your fishing rod.
- Have your child go fishing and get the fish out of the water.



Cardboard Pictures

- Use a piece of cardboard or an old box for this activity.
- Draw a picture or design on the box. This could be an animal, shape, object, random design, writing a name or letters, or anything you want.
- Poke holes into the cardboard on the picture.
- Give your child objects to place in the holes such as toothpicks, Q-tips, straws, pipe cleaners, popsicle sticks, or anything else you have.



Container Play

- Use any empty jars or containers for your child to play with. Here are some examples of containers or cans you can use:
 - Wipe's container
 - Peanut butter jar
 - Puffs container
 - Water bottle
 - Pringles can
 - Coffee can
 - Formula can
 - Condiment containers
 - Milk jugs
 - Parmesan cheese
 - Gum containers
 - Oatmeal can
- Gather different materials for your child to place in the containers such as:
 - Dry foods (cereal, pasta, beans, etc.)
 - Wine corks
 - Bottle caps
 - Pouch tops
 - Buttons
 - Straws
 - Cotton balls
 - Popsicle sticks
 - Q-tips
 - Expired credit cards or IDs
 - Pipe cleaners
 - Coins
- Allow your child to explore placing these materials in and out of the containers.
- You can also make any container a shape sorter by cutting holes or slits into the top of the lids.
- Show off your creative side by turning these containers into monsters or animals that are hungry and need fed!



References

- 7 Days of Play. (2021, February 9). *DIY fishing game*. [Video]. TikTok.
<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMebKJxKQ/>
- 7 Days of Play. (2021, February 2). *DIY tongs for fine motor skills*. [Video]. TikTok.
<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMeb93XGx/>
- 7 Days of Play. (2020, September 11). *Poke the porcupine while strengthening finger muscles*. [Video]. TikTok. <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMebwEa6r/>
- Beth. (2015). Toddler fine motor clothespin activity [Photograph]. Days with Grey.
<https://dayswithgrey.com/fine-motor/activity-for-one-year-olds-toddler-fine-motor/>
- Bly, J. (n.d.). [Container play] [Photograph]. The Deliberate Mom.
<https://thedeliberatemom.com/opening-containers-an-activity-for-infants-and-toddlers/>
- Bobnar, A. (2017). *6 DIY toys to encourage fine motor development*. Wonder baby.
<https://www.wonderbaby.org/articles/toys-for-fine-motor-development>
- Bobnar, A. (2017). Feed the monster [Photograph]. Wonder baby.
<https://www.wonderbaby.org/articles/toys-for-fine-motor-development>
- Bobnar, A. (2017). Shoebox pegboard [Photograph]. Wonder Baby.
<https://www.wonderbaby.org/articles/toys-for-fine-motor-development>
- Child's Castle. (2018). [Tearing paper] [Photograph]. Child's Castle.
<https://childscastle.wordpress.com/2017/09/12/3-stages-of-tearing-paper/>
- Costello, A. (2021). The hungry tennis ball [Photograph]. Occupational Therapy ABC.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CLXwfmvhw04/?igshid=fxrz8ylq4q09>
- Crafty Moms. (2020, March 28). *The best activity for fine motor skills* [Video]. TikTok.
<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMeq1mSUG/>
- Crafty Moms. (2021, March 21). *A clever way to practice name recognition* [Video]. TikTok.
<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMe9Vrbcy1>

Jamie. (2020). Fruit loop necklace [Photograph]. Hands on as We Grow.

<https://handsonaswegrow.com/threading-activities-kids/>

Jamie. (2020). Pool noodle stringing [Photograph]. Hands on as We Grow.

<https://handsonaswegrow.com/threading-activities-kids/>

Jamie. (2020). Threading egg cartons [Photograph]. Hands on as We Grow.

<https://handsonaswegrow.com/threading-activities-kids/>

Kate. (2017). Threading cardboard beads [Photograph]. Laughing Kids Learn.

<https://laughingkidslearn.com/threading-activity-for-toddlers-using-large-cardboard-beads/>

Kiley, C. (2015, March 3). *Toddler fine motor activity: Mr. cascade crocodile*. Mama ot.

<http://mamaot.com/toddler-fine-motor-activity-mr-cascade-crocodile/>

Kiley, C. (2015). Mr. cascade crocodile [Photograph]. Mama OT. [http://mamaot.com/toddler-fine-](http://mamaot.com/toddler-fine-motor-activity-mr-cascade-crocodile/)

[motor-activity-mr-cascade-crocodile/](http://mamaot.com/toddler-fine-motor-activity-mr-cascade-crocodile/)

Kiley, C. (2015). [Tongs and pasta] [Photograph]. Mama OT. [http://mamaot.com/ways-to-play-with-](http://mamaot.com/ways-to-play-with-tongs/)

[tongs/](http://mamaot.com/ways-to-play-with-tongs/)

LaBuz, M. (2020, March 16). *26 Common household items that make cheap baby & toddler toys*.

Teaching littles. [https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-](https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/)

[cheap-baby-toddler-toys/](https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/)

LaBuz, M. (2020). [Credit card shape sorter] [Photograph]. Teaching Littles.

[https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-](https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/)

[toys/](https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/)

LaBuz, M. (2020). [Puffs container and wine corks] [Photograph]. Teaching Littles.

[https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-](https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/)

[toys/](https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/)

LaBuz, M. (2020). [Tape] [Photograph]. Teaching Littles. [https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-](https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/)

[common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/](https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/)

- LaBuz, M. (2020). [Ziplock bags] [Photograph]. Teaching Littles. <https://www.teachinglittles.com/26-common-household-items-that-make-cheap-baby-toddler-toys/>
- Leigh, M. (2018). Lacing cards [Photograph]. Live Well Play Together. <https://www.livewellplaytogether.com/diy-lacing-cards/>
- Louise. (2016). Playing with pasta [Photograph]. Messy Little Monster. <https://www.messylittlemonster.com/2016/05/pasta-play-simple-activities-for.html>
- Parks, S., & VORT Corporation. (1994). *HELP charts (birth to 3 years): Hawaii early learning profile*. VORT Corporation.
- Ranson, A. (2013, September 3). *40 Fine motor skills activities*. The imagination tree. <https://theimaginationtree.com/40-fine-motor-skills-activities-for-kids/>
- Ranson, A. (2013). Pipe cleaners and colanders [Photograph]. The Imagination Tree. <https://theimaginationtree.com/40-fine-motor-skills-activities-for-kids/>
- Susie. (2018). Tape rescue [Photograph]. Busy Toddler. <https://busytoddler.com/2018/09/animal-tape-rescue/>

This resource was created in 2021 by Caitlyn Janeda as part of a Doctoral Capstone Project for Slippery Rock University's Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program.